



# THE KING WHO COULD NOT LAUGH

*A Play*

PAUL VINCENT CARROLL

French's  
Acting  
Edition



THE KING WHO COULD NOT LAUGH

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# THE KING WHO COULD NOT LAUGH

A Play for Children of All Ages

by

PAUL VINCENT CARROLL

SAMUEL



FRENCH

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## CHARACTERS

THE KING.

HISPANO, *an Officer of the Bed Chamber.*

PATWATSKIN, *the Prime Minister.*

MARNITSKI, *the Court Physician.*

AUGUSTUS, *a Wanderer.*

ROSEMARY, *a Lost Child.*

TWO GUARDS.

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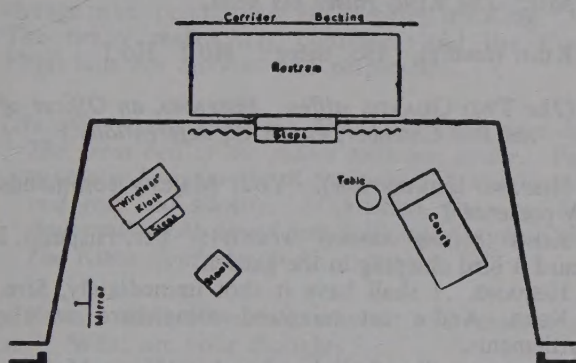
The action passes in a Rest Chamber of the Royal Palace of Karmia, a small country in the Far East.

Time : The present.





# The King Who Could Not Laugh



SCENE : *A Rest Chamber in the Royal Palace of Karmia, away to the East.*

*It is a large room, sombre and devoid of ornament, depending for colour and atmosphere on the heavy tapestries that are hung all around it. (See the GROUND PLAN.)*

*L.C., a large couch, beautifully draped, on which the KING reclines, the lower part of his body covered with draperies. His head hangs down and he is in deep melancholy. He has a gentle face, but is given to fiery outbursts of temper.*

*A small table near the bed : a large mirror at R. A large " wireless box, like a kiosk, at R.C., reached by two steps."*

*A large opening back, hung with curtains and manned by TWO GUARDS with lances "at the ready." At R.C., and down L., respectively, are PATWATSKIN, the hoary old Prime Minister, and MARNITSKI, the Court Physician. They stand, each in a brown study, contemplating the KING. A few heavy moments pass. The KING raises his head.*

KING (*loudly*). Ho, there ! Ho ! Ho !

*(The TWO GUARDS stiffen. HISPANO, an Officer of the Bed Chamber, enters C., deferentially.)*

HISPANO (*bowing low*). Your Majesty commands my presence ?

KING (*raising himself wearily*): Yes, Hispano, I heard a bird chirping in the garden.

HISPANO. I shall have it shot immediately, Sire.

KING. And a cat miaowed somewhere on the battlements.

HISPANO. She shall be shot too, Your Majesty.

KING. See to it. I must have silence to tone with my sad state. No sleep . . . no rest . . . no laugh or lift of the heart. . . . And, Hispano, let the palace bell be tolled again as a reminder to my people that the one who cures me of this wretched melancholy will receive a fortune equal in weight to himself.

HISPANO. Yes, Sire. (*He bows and turns to go.*)

KING. And, my lord.

HISPANO (*checking*). Yes, Sire ?

KING. Let it be tolled mournfully and with heavy sound, as befits our present state.

HISPANO. It shall be so, Your Majesty.

*(He bows and goes. PATWATSKIN is studying the KING*

*very pensively on the one side, and MARNITSKI is equally absorbed on the opposite side. The KING allows his head to fall on his chin. PATWATSKIN turns, goes slowly to the wireless box, R. He steps upon it and it is lighted up. He moves a lever and speaks.)*

PATWATSKIN. This is the Wireless Station of the Royal Palace of Karmia calling. . . . It is now the third hour. Since the midday hour, there is no change in the condition of His Majesty, the King. . . . The heavy melancholy continues and the Court Physicians are anxious and perplexed. . . .

*(He steps down from the box. The light goes out. The great bell of the palace tolls one stroke. PATWATSKIN bows to the KING, who takes no notice, and goes out silently. MARNITSKI, down L., continues pulling his beard pensively, studying the KING. The KING slowly raises his eyes.)*

KING. Well, Physician, why do you stare at me so? What are your thoughts?

MARNITSKI *(bowing gravely)*. I was debating with myself, Sire, as to a new course of treatment.

KING *(wearily)*. Some new concoction you are brewing behind that shaggy beard of yours, Marnitski?

MARNITSKI *(moving up C., and turning)*. There is ■ saying, Your Majesty, that desperate diseases need desperate remedies.

KING. Ah . . . I am weary of your nauseous bottles. *(The bell tolls again.)* Someday, Marnitski, I shall have your head! Someday I shall wash the battlements with your blood!

MARNITSKI *(bowing very low)*. Your Majesty has been very patient with me and very obedient.

KING. Aye . . . but even a king can rebel. *(He is interrupted by three sad tolls of the bell.)* There is

death in that sound.

MARNITSKI. Your Majesty, praise our gods, is as far from death as the stars are from the waters. (*He bows low.*)

KING (*impatiently*). Pah, you only appease me, as if I were a child and easily told the thing that is not so. Is a man not dead, Marnitski, when the light dies out of his mind and the love out of his soul?

MARNITSKI. These, Sire, are but passing shadows hiding your life, as our moon sometimes contends with shadows.

KING. Enough! I will not have you play with me. (*The bell tolls again.*) Get you hence.

(MARNITSKI *abjectly bows low and exits silently. The bell tolls again and the KING reclines once more. Enter HISPANO, C.*)

HISPANO (*bowing*). Your Majesty, the Prime Minister awaits without with important news.

KING (*irascibly*). Ppt! . . . Important news! . . . Some new stupid law of his, I suppose, for his stupid people. Bills to sign . . . schedules to fill . . . petitions to read. . . . Oh, my miserable life!

HISPANO. But there is one with him, Sire, whose features are not of this country. Perhaps—

KING (*raising himself a little*). Perhaps, Hispano . . . ?

HISPANO. He might have the secret of Your Majesty's health in his leather pouch.

KING. Or in his beard, Hispano. Patwatskin always carries *his* pearls in *his* beard.

HISPANO. But *he* has no beard, Your Majesty.

KING (*sitting erect*). No beard? Impossible! Perhaps he has a tail instead and is the Evil One disguised.

HISPANO. Patwatskin has broken bread with him for safety, Sire.

KING. Then let us have him in. I can always

vent my spleen on him if he is a humbug. Why, it is more than three days since I have had a fool or a knave hurled from the battlements. I am becoming resigned. I am learning by moderation to suffer fools gladly.

HISPANO. It is a kingly attribute, Sire. (*Bows low, opens door, and announces PATWATSKIN.*) His Excellency, Patwatskin !

(PATWATSKIN *comes in dodderingly, up C., his fingers in his hoary beard, his other hand holding a sheaf of papers. He bows with great difficulty. HISPANO goes out.*)

PATWATSKIN (*bowing with difficulty*). Your Majesty !

KING. Well, my poor old doddering Patwatskin, has the voice of the people not disposed of you yet ?

PATWATSKIN (*protestingly*). Im-impossible ! The people, if it please Your Majesty, are still solid in my favour.

KING. It does not please me. It makes me fume and fret that my country can be so ill-advised.

PATWATSKIN (*outraged*). But, Your Majesty, this is—unconstitutional !

KING. Someday, Patwatskin, I shall have *your* head. How constitutional will *that* be ?

PATWATSKIN. Impossible, Sire. Your taking of *my* head and separating it from my body would be illegal under Subsection 13 of the 21st Statute of the People's Government.

KING (*grimly*). We could go into that matter *after* the deed, Patwatskin. It is a king's privilege. In spite of all my kindness to them, is there one amongst your noisy mob who can cure me ?

PATWATSKIN. But, Your Majesty, there stands *one* without who wishes to look at you.

KING. For what purpose ?

PATWATSKIN. To prescribe for your lamentable

and ever-to-be-mourned illness.

KING. He is the fifty-fifth, and I have drunk their horrible concoctions till my soul has cried out for vengeance. Any more of it, Patwatskin, and I shall have your head—bones, beard, and all! Mark it! Mark it well!

PATWATSKIN. But this one comes unburdened, Sire.

KING. What! Has he not a caravan laden, like the others, with concoctions to torture me?

PATWATSKIN. He comes without even a box, Sire. He says your illness may lie hidden in the mind instead of in the flesh.

KING (*earnestly*). In the mind? That is a new thought. Let him be brought here instantly.

PATWATSKIN. I fear, Sire, his manners are not all that they might be. If Your Majesty will overlook—

KING. What! No manners and no beard. . . . What is his name?

PATWATSKIN. He says he has no name, Sire.

KING. No name either! Thunderbolts, is the fellow there at all?

PATWATSKIN. I assure you, Sire, he *is* there. He even tugged my beard with ill-timed levity.

KING. Let him come into my presence.

PATWATSKIN. Instantly, Sire.

(PATWATSKIN bows, signs to the door, and HISPANO ushers in AUGUSTUS and then goes back out. AUGUSTUS is a very fat little man, with a shock of white hair, no beard, big dancing eyes. He comes freely and without fear, looking about him in all directions.)

AUGUSTUS (*crossing down c.*). Well, well! What a dark sombre room for an ailing King. Eh? (*To PATWATSKIN*). Could you not buy a pennyworth of sunlight and six mouthfuls of hill wind?

PATWATSKIN (*awesomely*). Silence! You are in

the presence of the King. (*The little man squints. PATWATSKIN moves down R. a little.*) Your Majesty, this is the man of whom I have spoken.

(AUGUSTUS bows laboriously.)

AUGUSTUS. Pray excuse my bow, Sire. If I stoop too low, I tickle my spinal cord and that always makes me laugh.

PATWATSKIN. Silence !

KING. What is your name, Sire ?

AUGUSTUS. I confess, Your Majesty, I have mislaid it somewhere. Eh ? I believe I left it behind me in a wayside inn four miles beyond Yesterday. Just call me Augustus, King.

KING. Is that place marked on our maps, Patwatskin ?

PATWATSKIN. I cannot find it. I really must dismiss the Court Geographer for the state these records are in.

AUGUSTUS. The funny thing, Your Majesty, is that I never missed it until now, eh ! (*He laughs hilariously.*)

PATWATSKIN (*shocked*). Silence ! (*Apologetically*) Your Majesty !

KING. In truth, you are a funny fellow.

AUGUSTUS. Am I funny enough, Your Majesty, to make you laugh, eh ?

KING. You are not ! Nor all the clowns and jesters in my kingdom. I have not laughed for one hundred days.

PATWATSKIN. One hundred and *one* days, Sire !

AUGUSTUS. That is a pity. And so much to laugh at too, eh !

KING. Pity ? What do you mean by such a statement ?

AUGUSTUS. I mean, Sire, that the one who makes you laugh will cure you !

KING. What nonsense is this ?

AUGUSTUS. I say it because I know. Like this, Sire !

*(The little man throws back his head and roars with laughter. Immediately the TWO GUARDS come rushing forward horrified.)*

PATWATSKIN *(waving his hands desperately)*. Silence ! Silence ! Silence, fellow ! Silence ! Insult ! Insolence ! Guards, seize him !

*(The GUARDS seize him.)*

KING *(staring at him)*. Unhand him, Guards !

*(All stand to attention stiffly. The KING continues to stare.)*

Who taught you to laugh like that, fellow ?

AUGUSTUS. The children of the roads, Sire !

PATWATSKIN. The fellow is mad !

KING *(slowly)*. Are you mad, sir ?

AUGUSTUS. It depends, Your Majesty. If a laugh in a palace makes a whole hullabaloo, are the people living in it sane ?

PATWATSKIN *(fuming)*. I protest, Your Majesty. This is definitely seditious and—subversive !

KING. Stop ! There is a grain of truth in it. *(To AUGUSTUS.)* The children of the roads taught you, you say, to laugh like that. How did you find time to talk with children—you who are full-grown and a man ?

AUGUSTUS. Because I do not waste time listening to windy old greybeards speeching on the terraces—

PATWATSKIN *(outraged)*. Your Majesty !

AUGUSTUS. —and promising me things which they haven't got and can't give, eh ?

PATWATSKIN *(very sternly)*. Your Majesty ! !

AUGUSTUS. And, as you see, Sire, I am very wise.

KING. Who calls you wise ?



AUGUSTUS. The children I laugh and sing with on the roads.

KING. How do *they* know who is wise ?

AUGUSTUS. Because they are themselves wise. And the wise—know each other, eh ?

KING. This seems unreasonable——

PATWATSKIN. And treasonable, too, Your Majesty.

KING (*to* AUGUSTUS). Why do you say children ~~are~~ wise ?

AUGUSTUS. Because they do not shout and yell for their rights, as your miserable people do on the terraces, or weep and snivel over their wrongs.

PATWATSKIN (*with dignity*). Sire ! In the ~~name~~ of the Society of Old Patwatskinians, I formally protest against such malicious talk. It is unconstitutional.

KING. We shall talk of the Constitution later, Patwatskin—that is, if there is any of it left. (*To* AUGUSTUS.) You puzzle me, fellow.

AUGUSTUS. Children have puzzled *me*, too.

KING. You say I must laugh in order to be cured ?

AUGUSTUS (*meaningly, as he moves a little nearer the head of the couch*). I say more than that, Sire. (*Slowly*.) Unless you laugh soon, you will die.

PATWATSKIN. Your Majesty, this is monstrous !

KING (*silencing* PATWATSKIN *with a wave and addressing* AUGUSTUS). You are certainly a blunt fellow.

AUGUSTUS. I am not polite enough to be a liar, Your Majesty, eh ?

(*A pause.*)

KING. Well then, I must die.

(*The bell tolls again, and continues for a moment or two. All bow their heads. There is a sudden commotion without. The GUARDS run out, and return dragging between them a rather bedraggled-looking*

*school child of about eight years. She is grasping a partly eaten pear. All stare as the GUARDS come down C., salute the KING, and stand the GIRL before him.)*

KING (*sternly, regarding the GIRL*). What is the meaning of this intrusion ?

FIRST GUARD. This miscreant, Your Majesty, was caught redhanded eating Your Majesty's pears in Your Majesty's private garden.

KING. Thunder and hailstones ! My special pears !

SECOND GUARD. She is not of Your Majesty's country, and seems lost.

KING. Lost ? Her apparel certainly seems barbarous to me.

GIRL (*womanishly*). But this is just a new dress, King, only I fell in a flower bed.

(*Broad smiles generally. AUGUSTUS, up L.C., gurgles.*)

PATWATSKIN. You are not to speak in the King's presence until you are commanded.

GIRL. Well, he didn't tell you to speak, either.

(*Broad smiles again. KING remains grave. The GUARDS have released the GIRL. She stands between them.*)

PATWATSKIN (*censoriously*). Madam !

GIRL. Mademoiselle, if you please.

(*Gurgles from AUGUSTUS.*)

KING. What is your name, child ?

GIRL. Rosemary, King, if it please you.

KING (*gently*). Mm . . . It does please me. It is a sweet name.

GIRL. And your pears are sweet, too, King.

(*AUGUSTUS gurgles noisily.*)

KING (*severely*). Why this levity before me, fellow ?

GIRL. I was going to check him myself, King.

AUGUSTUS. I forgot, Your Majesty. I thought I was listening to her out on the roadside, and was free to laugh.

KING. Free to laugh. (*Pensively.*) There is a sabre thrust in that. . . . (*To the GIRL.*) Whence have you come, child ?

GIRL. I fell out of the caravan that my parents were travelling in to a place where gold lies hidden, and I wandered everywhere until I found myself in a lovely garden.

KING. And then you stole my select pears ? Unhappy child, for that you must die !

GIRL (*aghast*). Die, King ? But I'm not long born yet. How could I die ?

KING. It is written in Patwatskin's Constitution that whosoever damages the King's property must die.

PATWATSKIN. Article 19, Section 10 ; Subsection 15B.

GIRL. Just imagine—dying for a pear ! I've read of people that died for a dream, or for love, but never for a pear, King. That's the worst of having old people working too long, King. In my country, they put them to bed like my granddad, and give them chicken soup and the Old Age Pension.

(AUGUSTUS *breaks into hearty laughter.* PATWATSKIN *stamps angrily.*)

PATWATSKIN (*shakingly*). Your Majesty, I protest ! This is an outrage on the Constitution. This miscreant must die, and the Constitution be upheld !

AUGUSTUS (*coming down a pace*). If *she* dies, the King also will die.

(*All stiffen. Ominous silence.*)

KING (*angrily*). What mean you fellow ?

AUGUSTUS (*turning to the KING*). She has the secret of your illness, Sire.

KING. She ? Where ? She carries nothing on her person !

AUGUSTUS. Within her, where all wise things are carried.

KING (*puzzled*). Is this true, child ?

GIRL. I'm afraid, King, he's making it all up. And he has no manners, anyway.

(*She moves down R.C., and looks at PATWATSKIN.*)

PATWATSKIN. I demand his arrest. He is a menace to the Constitution. He is an enemy of the people !

KING. Seize him, Guards !

(*The GUARDS grip AUGUSTUS, the GIRL turns to face them.*)

Do you persist in saying the monstrous things you have said ?

AUGUSTUS. (L. C., *between the GUARDS.*) I do. If she dies, you die. It is written down.

KING. Written ? Where ?

AUGUSTUS. Where fools cannot read it !

KING. Outrage ! Let him be hurled from the battlements ! To it ! To it !

(*GUARDS begin to drag AUGUSTUS away. The GIRL moves to C., crying out in horror and covering her face with her hands.*)

GIRL (*involuntarily*). Oh, King ! The poor man ! Oh, you—you couldn't do a wicked thing like that !

KING (*excusing himself*). But what can I do with him ? His tongue has outraged me.

GIRL. Make him put his finger on his lip for two hours, King. Our teacher made us do that in Ireland when we didn't know our history dates.

(AUGUSTUS, *in spite of being tightly held, laughs involuntarily.*)

GIRL. There's that fellow's bad manners again !

KING (*impressed*). In truth there is wisdom in this child. Release him, Guards. Place your finger on your lips for two hours.

(AUGUSTUS, *now released, puts a large finger over his mouth. The GUARDS return to their original posts.*)

AUGUSTUS. Can I say one word, Sire, before I'm silenced, eh ?

KING. If—

GIRL. No, now, King. You must have none of that. You must be very firm in this matter—just like our teacher.

KING (*with a bow to GIRL*). Your request is refused, fellow. We must be firm. (AUGUSTUS *nods, his finger over his mouth.*) But we must be firm in your case, too, child. Tell me, why did you eat my wretched pears ?

GIRL. Because, King, they were made to be eaten.

PATWATSKIN (*moving a pace or two, to C.*). A dangerous and subversive doctrine, Your Majesty.

KING (*waving him off*). But—they were mine, child.

(PATWATSKIN *backs to R.C. once more.*)

GIRL. Oh, I know, King. But goodness me, you could never eat them all yourself, and of course Mr. Patsy Watkin here, has no teeth.

(AUGUSTUS *explodes under his finger.*)

PATWATSKIN (*outraged*). Your Majesty, I protest !

AUGUSTUS (*pointing excitedly at KING*). Mm !  
mm ! mm ! mm ! . . .

FIRST GUARD. His Majesty smiled !

SECOND GUARD. The King smiled !

(*They have rushed forward, and are gazing at the KING.*)

AUGUSTUS. Mm ! Mm !

KING (*rising excitedly*). Did I smile ? Did I ?  
Tell me, or I'll have all your heads in one basket !

GIRL. Oh, goodness !

PATWATSKIN (*shaking*). I believe I saw the muscles  
of Your Majesty's face slacken slightly.

AUGUSTUS. Mm ! Mm ! . . .

KING. I believe I felt it myself. I feel as if some  
new life was creeping through me. What ho !  
There ! I want to sneeze !

PATWATSKIN (*shouting*). Officer of the Bed Cham-  
ber !

(*As HISPANO appears at door.*)

Bring the royal handkerchief !

HISPANO (*rushing out*). Instantly ! Instantly !

(*He returns at once with a large silk handkerchief on a  
silver tray, which he holds to the KING'S nose, and  
the KING blows. ROSEMARY has been watching  
with large incredible eyes, and is so amused that she  
exclaims involuntarily.*)

GIRL (*laughing*). Oh, goodness ! Just imagine !  
(*Moving to PATWATSKIN.*) The King can't blow his  
own nose yet !

(*She giggles helplessly. PATWATSKIN is outraged. The  
KING takes his nose out of the handkerchief and stares  
at her.*)

(*To the KING.*) My daddy can blow his own nose

like a foghorn. Mammy's always checking him for it when we have company for tea.

*(The KING's face relaxes into a bright broad smile. All exclaim in surprise. Great commotion.)*

HISPANO. Your Majesty is smiling ! *(Backing to C., in delight.)*

PATWATSKIN. His Majesty is smiling !

ALL. The King smiles again !

GUARDS *(raising lances)*. Long may the King smile !

GIRL *(below and R. of HISPANO)*. And just about time too, King. I thought you were a schoolmaster when I saw you first !

KING. Yes, I am smiling. . . . I am smiling. . . . Hispano, let a golden robe be brought and put upon this child. She shall see that the King is not ungrateful. *(As HISPANO bows and runs off.)* And let yon fellow who lost his name be given back his voice. Speak, Augustus.

AUGUSTUS *(moving to C., and turning)*. Is it not, Sire, as I have said ?

KING. It is so. There is wisdom in you, Augustus, and in this child. She shall have all the royal pears, and the royal cat to play with, and Patwatskin shall yield her up his beard to make her a silken pincushion.

PATWATSKIN. Outrage, Your Majesty ! As a member of the Old Patwatskinians—

KING. Enough !

*(PATWATSKIN sits down disgusted. HISPANO comes in with a golden cloak and hat for ROSEMARY, which he puts on her. She crosses down R. and examines herself in the mirror, and chuckles repeatedly. HISPANO exits C.)*

GIRL. Oh, goodness me, King. If they saw this on me in Dublin, they'd call out the Fire Brigade.

*(She goes on chuckling, and admiring herself.)*

KING. Dublin ! What a strange name ! Have we any records of such a place on our books, Patwatskin ?

PATWATSKIN *(consulting papers)*. It is not marked on the map, Sire.

GIRL *(turning from the mirror, incensed)*. It is so marked on the map. Our teacher gave me two snorters with the belt for not pointing it out quick enough.

*(The KING smiles broadly, and all smile after him.)*

KING. Two snorters ! What strange punishment is this she speaks of ?

PATWATSKIN. It is beyond us, Your Majesty.

GIRL. That's the Irish way, Your Majesty, of—hurling you from the battlements.

*(The KING audibly titters, much to the enjoyment of the rest.)*

KING. In truth, this is a provocative wench. Augustus, fellow, you were right. I shall have you weighed against your weight in gold.

HISPANO *(appearing at the door)*. Make way ! Make way for the King's medicine chest !

*(MARNITSKI enters up C., wheeling a trolley covered with medicine bottles, glasses, and flasks. PATWATSKIN rises. HISPANO remains up C.)*

MARNITSKI (C.). Your Majesty, it is the fifth hour, and I beg leave to engage your attention.

KING. What ! Is this you again, Marnitski, with your vile concoctions ? A plague on your head !

GIRL *(wryly, as she moves to R. of MARNITSKI, looking at all the medicine)*. Oh, gracious me !



Oh, you poor thing !

KING. Tarnations and thunderbolts ! Must this go on forever ?

MARNITSKI. Your Majesty will disobey my instructions at your peril.

GIRL (*crossing to the KING.*) I'm afraid, King, there's no use in having a carry-on. It never worked with Mammy anyway, and this fellow's every bit as bad ■ she was. May I hold your nose ? It's always so much easier, you know ! (*To the horror of the GUARDS, etc., she catches the KING's nose.*)

PATWATSKIN. Your Majesty ! This is absolutely unconstitutional ! (*He goes down R., incensed.*)

KING. Ooch ! Gm . . . ooch ! . . .

GIRL. Now, now ! . . . None of that ! . . . If you're quick about it, and not make ■ shindy, you'll get ■ jujube after it, and ■ suck of an orange. Won't he, dootor ?

(AUGUSTUS, at L.C., bursts into hearty chuckles. The GIRL looks severely at him, and releases the KING's nose.)

Do you know, King, I believe that fellow with the bad ■ manners could do with ■ good wallop of castor oil ?

KING (*heartily laughing*). A grand suggestion ! Stand forth, fellow ! You'll laugh at me, will you ?

(*The KING roars with laughter.*)

AUGUSTUS (*with good spirit*). I'll drink ■ whole pail of castor oil if it will make Your Majesty laugh like that.†

KING. That's the spirit I like ! And so I'll give you wine instead. Ho there ! Ho ! A flagon of wine for ■ wise ■■■ !

HISPANO (*at the door, shouting*). Wine ! Wine for His Majesty ! (*He moves out of sight.*)

MARNITSKI (R.C.). Your Majesty, I must forbid you to touch this liquor, and I must insist on your taking your medicine.

(HISPANO returns with a flagon of wine which he pours out into the glasses on MARNITSKI's trolley.)

KING. But I am well now. I can laugh. This child has given me back the sun. And death to Marnitski ! He has tortured me long enough. Ho ! Guards, seize him ! (*The GUARDS seize the trembling MARNITSKI.*) Marnitski, villain ! I have decided to hurl you, bottles and all, from the dizzy battlements. Out with him, Guards !

GIRL. Oh, Your Majesty, there, you're at it again ! Oh, the poor man, King, you'll hurt him, so you will !

KING. Hurt him ? Pah, make him food for passing dogs ! I shall settle with the villain now !

MARNITSKI (*groaning, with the GUARDS*). Mercy, mercy. Your Majesty, I have done my best.

GIRL. Oh, please, King !

AUGUSTUS. If it would please Your Majesty, would you allow the child to judge the Physician ? A child can be a wise judge.

KING. I have come to see there is truth in all you say, Augustus. Come then, she shall be the judge. Prepare Marnitski.

MARNITSKI. Mercy, mercy, Mademoiselle.

GIRL (*crossing to C., below the trolley*). Maybe, King, the fairest way would be for the doctor to be made to drink a whole bottle of his own medicine before the Court.

KING. Come, this is a merry judgment. Pour forth the castor oil, and fill to the brim, so that we shall have justice in full measure.

MARNITSKI (*wretchedly, with head down*). Mercy, Sire, mercy ! It makes me sick even to smell it. Oh, ooch ! . . . Gooch ! . . .

KING (*laughing gleefully*). Forward, wretch ! Ha ! I have dreamed of this. (HISPANO, *who is L. of the trolley, pours out the castor oil into a large tumbler.*) Drink deep, and if but once you take it from your lips, you die !

(*The GIRL takes the tumbler from HISPANO and gives it to MARNITSKI.*)

MARNITSKI (*woefully*). Ugh ! . . . ooch ! (*He raises the glass.*) Oh, ooch ! . . . Gooch ! . . . Gooch ! . . .

GIRL (*touched*). Oh, you poor thing, you ! (*She takes a clothespin from her pocket and puts it on his nose.*) There now ! You'll find that clothespin a big help. I always carry one with me when I'm travelling with Mammy.

KING. Drink, villain !

(*MARNITSKI drinks, making wretched noises, and during the process the KING rocks with laughter. AUGUSTUS and the GIRL enjoy the spectacle also, and MARNITSKI having finished, crawls out woefully.*)

KING (*as he goes, raising wine*). Let us drink, Augustus, to this child who has given us back the laughter that is life.

AUGUSTUS (*at L.C., raising his glass*). A worthy toast, Sire.

(*They raise their glasses and drink merrily. HISPANO collects the glasses and goes.*)

KING (*tiredly*). I am tired laughing. Happiness has made me weary. I believe I could sleep. (*Heartfully.*) To sleep ! . . . perchance to dream ! . . . That would be happiness indeed.

PATWATSKIN (*down R.*). Shall I have the sleeping draughts brought, Sire ?

KING. No ! Let them be burned like an evil memory.

GIRL (*crossing to below the couch*). I'll tuck you in, King, if you'll lie down then. (*She moves up L. of the couch.*)

KING (*gratefully*). Ah ! I was waiting for that. Come then. (*He lies down and the GIRL draws the silken coverlets around him.*)

GIRL. Come now ! Put your arms under the clothes right, and be good.

KING (*putting in his arms*). Everything is shifting and moving about, child, as if I was being carried along on an eagle's back.

GIRL. Try counting sheep going through a gap, King. It's a great help.

KING. I've never seen a sheep. There's none in this country. Will elephants do ?

GIRL. Oh, just imagine ! You'd think it was the Zoo. Try them, anyway.

KING (*counting sleepily*). One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six . . . Oh, botheration, the seventh's got stuck in the gap. Will you sing to me, instead ?

GIRL (*moving up L. of the head of the couch*). Close your eyes then, and let on you're on the hobby horses.

(*The KING gives a long sigh. The GIRL begins singing softly. PATWATSKIN moves to R.C., and stands motionless, watching, his hand in his beard. AUGUSTUS moves to the bedside, opposite GIRL. The GUARDS droop their lances and bow their heads sleepily.*)

GIRL (*singing*).

When fires die down and stars come out,  
And tired eyes close wearily,  
And all the birds with folded wings,  
Are sleeping snug as snug can be ;  
When books are closed and pretty toys

Are laid by sleepy hands away,  
 'Tis sweet to hear the loved one's lips,  
 "Sweet dreams, sweet dreams,  
 And angels near you stay."

*(As she finishes, the GIRL says "Ssh," and puts her finger to her lips. PATWATSKIN, bowing low, turns R., crosses noiselessly to the wireless box, steps upon it, the light springing up.)*

PATWATSKIN. This is the Wireless Station of the Royal Palace of Karmia, the Prime Minister speaking. It is now the ninth hour. With heartfelt thanks we announce that the King's heavy melancholy has been dispersed by the charm of a lost child who has happily wandered into the palace, bringing happiness to His Majesty. He is now sleeping soundly for the first time in many weeks, and is on the road back to health. Long live the King.

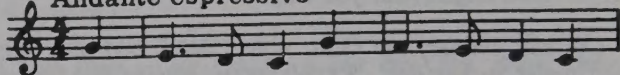
*(He steps down from the box. The light goes out. All look down at the KING and smile. PATWATSKIN smilingly strokes his beard.)*

CURTAIN.

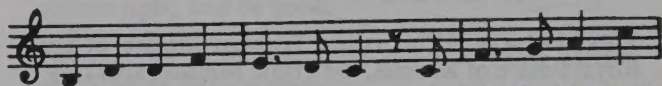
# Sleeping Song

from "The King Who Could Not Laugh"

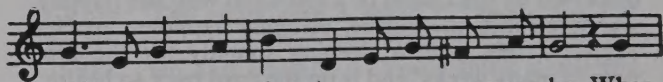
*Andante espressivo*



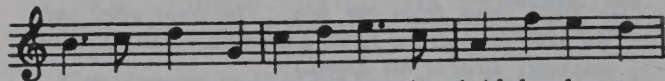
When fires are low, and stars come out And



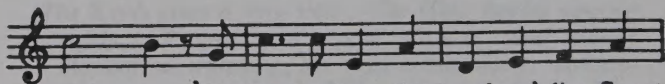
ti-red eyes close wea-ri - ly, And all the birds with



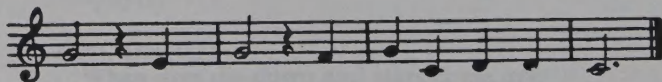
fold-ed wings are sleep-ing snug as snug can be; When



books are closed and pret-ty toys Are laid, by sleep-y



hands a-way, 'Tis sweet to hear the loved one's lips, Sweet



dreams, Sweet dreams, And ang-els near you stay.



PAUL VINCENT CARROLL

THE  
KING WHO  
COULD NOT  
LAUGH

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